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IN WAR TIME

A Sermon

PREACHED IN THE CHURCH OF THE DISCIPLES
BOSTON, APRIL 24, 1898

By CHARLES G. AMES

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There is in every question a right side, if we can but find it. A cause, a party, or a State, which is mainly in the right, though partially wrong, merits not our sympathy alone, but our support, against one which is mainly wrong, but partially right. — *Lorimer's "Institutes of Law."*

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IN WAR TIME.

"When ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, be ye not troubled; for such things must needs be. . . . Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be earthquakes in divers places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginning of travail."— MARK xiii. 7, 8.

WITH words like these did Jesus prepare his disciples to look with calmness on earthly scenes of violence and confusion. If we have been instructed in his school and have caught his spirit, we shall contemplate worldly events from a point above the world,— not from indifference, but in confidence that, when the waters roar and are troubled and the floods lift up their voice, there is above all a Power mightier than the proud waves of the sea. Then comes a hint of the great hope that all these convulsions are "the beginning of travail," the mighty birth-pangs of creation groaning in its struggle to produce a diviner race of men, the true sons of God.

Wars and rumors of wars! "Such things must needs be," says Jesus. Why must there be wars and fightings? James, the kinsman of Jesus, finds their origin in the activity of the lower range of human passions, which recognize no restraint of moral law. "It must needs be that offences will come; but woe to the man by whom they come!" And woe to the nation which is dragged into war by immoral or non-moral forces within itself! But when a nation engages in war to defend its own existence, or from pure promptings of sympathy with outraged and helpless neighbors, heaven and earth must see the case in a very different light. And so must the most ardent non-resistant. There are wars and wars, though all are to be classed with earthquakes, famines,

pestilences, and other evils, whose outcome may yet be for good.

I speak to those who wish and seek the welfare and happiness of all mankind,— those whose love of country makes them long to see the United States foremost in the procession of human benefactors, and who therefore cannot witness without grief and shame any single step of public policy aside from the open path of reason, fairness, and equity.

In a conflict between our own imperfect civilization and the cruel, blood-sucking barbarism of belated mediævalism, surely no American can wish for the triumph of the arms of Spain. If the wretched condition of Cuba is due in part to the atrocities of the insurgents, and still more to the murderous military policy of the Spaniards, we are to remember that the whole horrible situation is the outcome of a system of oppression, plunder, and misrule, which has been going on for four hundred years.

According to my reading of recent history, it had become urgently necessary for the United States to intervene. So long as our intervention was along the lines of diplomacy and friendly protest,— firm and with little menace,— I believe the Spanish government was gradually yielding to the moral pressure brought to bear by our wise President. He seems to have acted in the spirit of Washington, who in his Farewell Address used these words: "It will be worthy of a free, enlightened, and, at no distant period, a great nation to give to mankind the magnanimous and too novel example of a people always guided by an exalted justice and benevolence."

The present Spanish prime minister, who is avowedly liberal, had seemed disposed to meet us half-way. Hence his offer to give to Cuba a form of self-government as complete as that of Canada; to suspend hostilities, and hold a friendly parley with the insurgent chiefs; to stop the policy of starvation; and to submit the question of responsibility for the destruction of the battle-ship "Maine" to impartial

arbitration. If we could have waited a little longer, to test the sincerity of Sagasta's professions, it may be that our only remaining ground of complaint would have lain in Spain's very natural reluctance to relinquish her last American possessions, over which her flag has waved ever since the days of Columbus.

But, for reasons which are not quite apparent, the bare possibility of a peaceable settlement was exceedingly irritating to a very active and pushing party in both Houses of Congress; and with reckless haste they have forced through the resolutions for war in a form most certain to exasperate and inflame the spirit of a nation which, even in its degeneracy and decay, is the proudest and most sensitive in Christendom. In our quarrel with Spain we have a right to invoke the names of "liberty and humanity." If these sacred words have been profaned by a hypocritical use, not the less earnestly should we wish and seek their honorable vindication by giving our cordial sympathy and support to the government in the coming struggle.

Against a policy of haste and violence many citizens have joined in a patriotic but unavailing protest. Now that the fire has been kindled and cannot be quenched, every breath of belated remonstrance only serves to fan the conflagration. Perhaps, after the painful suspense of recent weeks, we may even experience a certain relief in knowing the worst. At any rate, our present part is to accept and endure and hope. And, as John Weiss says, "an accomplished fact takes its place in the order, against which it is sacrilege to rebel." Now that the die is cast, we have no choice but to abide by the result, whether we like it or not.

To abide by the result,—what does that mean? Not that we are to pretend to approve what we regard as wrong or foolish; not that we feel bound to say that Congress has acted wisely in overbearing the moderate counsels of the President; not that we are indifferent to a vast

backward lurch of our own nation, or to those unspeakable injuries to ourselves and others which we invite and inflict. But we cannot recall or undo the past. We must face the present, and deal with the facts as they are. Says Burke, "The situation of a man is the preceptor of his duty." With the actual outbreak of hostilities the situation has changed. Our present inquiry is, What is our duty in time of actual war? Our first need is to understand.

Events are our teachers: they are methods of divine revelation. In a black night I have walked safely along a perilous path by the guidance of flashes which came from the very clouds which made the darkness. Even the lurid light of war may reveal to us our way and our work.

We are finding out how far the world is from a state of Christian grace. We are finding out what we are and where we are, what kind of statesmen we have and what kind of people they represent, what evil possibilities there are in journalism, and what kind of civilization we live in.

If we cherished the notion that wars had become impossible, we are learning our mistake. We have heard the yell for revenge, the howl for blood. We have heard curses on all forms of international arbitration. We have heard shouts of delight over the prospect of a naval contest that should redden the waters where for more than eighty years the commerce of the world has ridden in safety. We have been told by public men that war is a good thing to keep a nation wide-awake and to make business lively. And we have heard talk of a "holy war."

"A holy war" is a taking phrase, very welcome to the popular ear and easy to put in circulation. But was there ever a war which did not set up for itself that high pretence? Who will confess to an unholy war? Not the Spaniard! At this moment, when thousands of our heroic young men are hastening to offer their lives to our country's cause, we know that other thousands, equally brave and loyal, are rallying to the standard of a queen who abhors

the idea of shedding their blood or ours, and that an impoverished nation is on its knees crying to Heaven for victory over a prosperous and powerful foe, whose forces outnumber theirs four to one. If, on our side, this is to pass into history as "a holy war," it will never come from our depending on Satan to cast out devils. But, should Satan prove foolish enough to upset his own kingdom, it is not for us to make objections.

The passion for vengeance is not a holy passion. The willingness to inflict injuries, even on a malignant enemy, is not holy. The indiscriminate plunder of non-combatants is not the work of saintly men. And what shall we say of the greed of contractors, the ambition of officers for promotion, the schemes of politicians for popularity and partisan success, and the new hope of pushing the country into vast expenditures so as to compel a debased coinage and the indefinite issue of paper money? Influences such as these have been noisily, viciously, odiously active; and they make it easy to play upon that half-animal impulse within us all which readily palpitates at the sound of a drum.

Quite likely, as the world now goes, we should have been obliged to unsheathe the sword, even if these baser forces had been held in check; but who really believes that we should have been hurried into conflict with such vulgar bluster and such shameless levity of temper?

It is necessary to refer to the past activity of these evil forces because they are still active, and because there is danger that they will dominate the conduct of the war and work still greater mischiefs after the return of peace. It is in the face of difficulties and dangers like these that we must seek an answer to the question, *What is our duty in war time?*

As patriots and as friends of mankind, we should not waste our energies and break our hearts in a useless protest against the war which is actually upon us. *Our immediate business is to take care that civilization shall receive from the*

war the least possible damage. When the firemen are satisfied that a burning building must be abandoned to its fate, they turn all their energies to the saving of other buildings and to preventing the spread of the conflagration.

While the war rages, we must serve the country by doing our best to keep its spirit and policy at the highest and most honorable level, to ward off incidental mischiefs and tie the hands of mischief-makers, to pour balsam into the wounds that are sure to come, and to work for such results as may promise a minimum of evil and a maximum of good. These general statements can be made very practical. Let us study the situation more closely.

The worst effect of a state of war is not in the waste of life and property: it is in the impairment of the quality of the population. This damage is done largely by inducing an unwholesome excitement, which distracts the people from attending to their true and permanent interests, and ravels out those results of intellectual and moral culture which are gained with so much difficulty. Attention and force are turned from higher things. We lose our heads and our hearts.

Public taste becomes perverted. We are fascinated by every item of war news, true or false. Unscrupulous journals willingly magnify and distort facts and rumors, and even invent whatever tales or versions may keep the people eager for more. There is little room for the nobler literature, for quiet culture and growth. Art and science are at a discount. Who cares that fifteen millions of children are at school, when a war-ship bids a merchant vessel stand and deliver the cargo just purchased at our own wharves?

War lowers all moral standards. "Amid arms the laws are silent." Is the Holy Ghost also silent? Who can listen to "the small and inward voice" when all the air is vibrant with the sound of blows given and taken? Now will men do shameful things: they will give way to greed, falsehood, passion; they will grow familiar with the idea

that it is right to hurt and kill; they will delight in the misfortunes of those from whom they differ, at home as well as abroad.

Domestic life suffers. The means of living are wasted. Men live less quietly with their families. They drink more. The saloons reap a harvest. Heavier burdens are laid on the hands and hearts of women. The boys break away from restraint. The girls are exposed to a coarser companionship.

Education suffers. The excitement reaches every schoolroom. A fourteen-year-old lad writes me from the West that in the history class they can talk of nothing but the war, and that the passing of a regiment filled the town with excitement.

Religion suffers. The appeals of spiritual truth, the message of God, can get no serious hearing. When we are at strife with our human brothers, we do not care to be reminded that we have all one Father. Every good work goes harder. Already we read of a falling off in contributions to the missionary treasuries and the benevolent societies. The pulpit itself is sorely tempted to say what excited and angry men wish to hear; and they do not wish to hear a blessing pronounced upon the peace-makers.

The whole process of citizen-making is arrested or perverted. At the end of the war we find that the country has a baser population, and that new difficulties are in the way of good government. In nation, state, and town we shall pay a higher price and get a poorer article. Politics will be more corrupt than ever. Business methods will be more crooked; for the battles of competition will be fiercer and more unscrupulous.

In fighting for liberty and humanity abroad, we run a sad risk of impairing liberty and degrading humanity at home. In a time of general excitement and disturbance, and when the attention and energies of the people are largely absorbed in resistance to foreign dangers, bad men find their oppor-

tunity, and take advantage. The body politic, too, is in a feverish state, and is predisposed to every form of disease. An epidemic of crime there is sure to be, and this will fill the soil with seeds of future crime.

To what human agency shall we look, if not to the Church, for the influences and activities that are to counteract the dreadful evils that attend and follow a state of war? Everything for which the Church stands is threatened with impairment: everything for which it prays and labors is imperilled. But the same lurid light which shows our dangers shows also our grand opportunity. Let us still pursue the inquiry, What is our duty in time of war?

1. We must take care of our own souls,— of our moral and spiritual interests. "The good life does not suffer itself to be interrupted," said the noble Roman emperor. We cannot afford to go wrong because others do, nor to lower our standard at the bidding of a spurious patriotism. We must not catch the evil infection of the time: we must maintain our purity and peace of mind, our sweetness and serenity. We must keep our souls free from the crimes that are sure to be committed, and our garments clear of the blood that is sure to be guiltily shed. Who does not honor Whittier's brave, weaponless soldier of peace?

> "The Quaker of the olden time,
> How calm and firm and true,
> Unspotted by its wrong and crime,
> He walked the dark earth through!"

I realize that we are all helplessly involved in the meshes of corporate responsibility, and that we can by no means wholly separate ourselves from participating in national acts and policies. And I speak with innermost tenderness and respect toward those who, from a high sense of duty and devotion, are volunteering for service on land or sea. I know, also, that it is possible to take on one's conscience the awful responsibilities of helping to carry on a long and

bloody war without yielding to one unkind or ungenerous impulse toward the public enemy. Glad as I was and am for the triumph of the Union cause, I have never ceased to be sad over the woes inflicted upon our Southern countrymen. And, while I shall rejoice in every victory of our country's flag, I shall be a sincere mourner for every dead Spaniard as for every dead American. Are they not equally my brothers in the family of God?

2. We must protect society against interruptions and injuries to its better life. For a long time all public-spirited men and women have had their hearts and hands full. They have been kept wakeful and watchful by large demands for reform and improvement. There are many precious interests to be cared for, many serious problems to be settled, many young and promising movements to be pushed to maturity and success. Every family has its own affairs to look after. Without redoubled vigilance, every community will suffer and fall behind in its business, its industries, its civil order and its virtue.

3. We can co-operate with the President in holding public opinion and public attention to the single purpose of delivering and pacifying Cuba, if, indeed, such pacification is possible. I have said that the object of the war on our side is capable of a high and honorable construction. I willingly believe that the great mass of our people regard it as a duty, as well as a necessity,—a duty to the great future, as well as a necessity of the present,—to break the cruel arm which holds Cuba in shameful bondage, and to extinguish the last vestige of Spanish power in the western hemisphere.

But there are men with Cuban bonds in their pockets who may soon come forward, and demand that our government enforce collection of their coupons. Schemes of conquest and annexation already loom in the background. And many are more than willing to push the war beyond its avowed limits by inflicting needless injury and humiliation

upon Spain, and leaving her a permanent and dependent cripple among the nations, a burden to the world. We should thus make ourselves responsible for strangling the young and hopeful elements — our natural allies — which are seeking to bring that ancient kingdom into line with modern progress.

Let our government do itself the honor to restrict its use of force to the accomplishment of its own declared purpose, — a purpose which all the world may yet approve. The less said about revenge, the better for our national reputation and character. Is it seemly that our seamen should kill other seamen, in hot blood, for a crime in which they had no more part than we? And who has commissioned us to punish the present generation of Spaniards for the crimes of the Inquisition three hundred years ago, or for the cruel expulsion of the Jews, or for the horrors attending the conquest of Mexico and Peru? The cup of Spanish iniquity may be full; but let us be careful that we do not add to our own.

The Hebrew prophets recognized the purpose of an overruling Providence in dashing one nation against another for the punishment of great crimes; but they also recognized the fact that the punisher would surely be punished in turn for any arrogance, cruelty, or injustice.

In the matter of privateering the President guards our national honor by refusing to follow the ugly example of Spain. Why should he not go a step further? Why not prohibit our navy from seizing and appropriating private property on the sea, as our armies are prohibited from seizing it upon the land? The thievish desire to share the plunder of non-combatants is not thought necessary as a means of promoting the enlistment of soldiers. Why should we thus corrupt our marines? Or, if it is wise policy to disable an enemy by striking at private commerce, why should we not also pillage warehouses and mercantile establishments? Has not the time come to incorporate one more

humane and just article into the code of what is curiously called Christian warfare?

4. Even amid the clash of arms, if our Christianity and philanthropy are anything but an empty, mocking pretence, we must keep up a firm remonstrance against the passion for fighting and the readiness to resort to it or to threaten it on all occasions. We cannot innocently suppress this remonstrance because it is denounced as untimely. We must indeed postpone for a time the demand for disarmament; but, as we love our race and reverence God, we must renew that demand, and press it steadily, till America heads the procession of the race toward that better day when the nations shall learn war no more.

The fact is, the jingoistic bluster of recent years has demoralized and debauched the public mind. There has been a growing fondness for brutal conflicts; and popular feeling contemplates the sacrifice of life with shocking levity.

Even the waste of our capital is a very serious matter. With a show of virtue, we are called upon to put aside all merely mercenary considerations; to impose vast and crushing burdens upon the industry of the future; to fling into a bottomless pit the material resources whose accumulation has been slow and toilsome, and whose preservation is vitally related to human welfare and progress. To waste money is to waste more than money. It is to waste all the precious things which money might help us to procure for the protection and comfort of women and children, for the improvement of domestic life, for the culture and enrichment of minds and hearts, for the building of a better social order. Every war puts new difficulties in the way of solving those economic problems which will not let us sleep, and plants dynamite under the foundations of society.

We go into this Cuban business with loud professions of zeal for liberty and humanity. Do we know of any worse foes to liberty and humanity than the great armies and navies of the world? On one hand is militarism, with its

never-satisfied demand for more men and guns, more fortresses and ships, more slaughter and savagery. On the other is the movement toward international arbitration and universal brotherhood. Which is the growing point of enlightenment and humanity? Is it found in the appeal to force or in the appeal to reason? Shall the blood-and-iron monarchies of the Old World gaze across the Atlantic, and ask with mocking wonder of the young and boastful American republic, "Art thou become as one of us?"

We have seen that the motives and the methods leading up to the present situation have been a mixture of wisdom and folly, virtue and vice. In the conduct of the war itself we are sure to witness the same mixture. But we may look on this piece of passing history as only one more episode in the long, sad, glorious process by which good is educed from evil.

War is justified only on the plane of semi-barbarism; for it represents human nature in a low state of development. With the advance of intelligence it appears stupid and senseless. With the advance of virtue it becomes hideous and wicked. Since war comes only when reason does not come, and since it can be made impossible only by the growth of reasonableness, why should we not continually seek to promote that growth by working all the agencies of intelligence, justice, and good will? Whatever other voices are on the air, the Church alike in peace and in war must keep up her testimony against all hatred and unrighteousness, her calm reliance on truth and love as the greatest powers in the world. For the Church represents the unity of mankind and the sacredness of all souls and bodies. She must never falter when iniquity abounds. She need never fear that the gates of hell will prevail. Even when "the blast of war's great trumpet shakes the skies," she still lifts up her unending song of peace and good will, her unending prayer that God's kingdom may come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

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